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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000724

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PBTS](#) [SA](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: IMPROVED YEMEN-SAUDI COOPERATION, BUT STILL NO SPECIFICS ON BORDER SECURITY PLAN

REF: A. FBIS GMP20040325000188

[1](#)B. FBIS GMP20040321000191

[1](#)C. SANAA 414

[1](#)D. SANAA 318

[1](#)E. RIYADH 822

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull, for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (c) Summary: Saudi Poloff al-Mqhm told Pol/Econ Chief on 3/27 that there is strong interest in Saudi-Yemen cooperation, including projected committee meetings to develop a joint strategy for border security. He confirmed that because of concerns over smuggling, the SAG opted to construct a "pipe fence" to prevent the movement of people, goods and weapons and that President Saleh's February visit to Riyadh resulted in an agreement between the Ministries of Interior (refs c-d). Although he commented favorably on increased security cooperation and prisoner exchanges, al-Mqhm insisted that there is no timeframe for a joint committee to meet to discuss border issues or for the pipe fence to be dismantled. He expects that the issue of border security will be discussed at the next meeting of the "Supreme Yemen-Saudi Cooperation Council," which he believes will be hosted in Riyadh, possibly as early as May 2004. Saudi Poloff was unable to confirm reports from ROYG officials of a joint border security plan that purportedly includes watchtowers, roads and vehicular border patrols. Al-Mqhm evaded questions on the now-postponed Arab League summit in Tunis and denied that there are any actions planned to follow-up on the 3/21 Saudi Foreign Minister's visit to Yemen. End summary.

POSITIVE ON COOPERATION, BUT VAGUE ON DETAILS OF NEXT STEPS

[1](#)2. (c) On March 27, Pol/Econ Chief met with Saudi First Secretary Badr Abdulmuhsen al-Mqhm to discuss plans for

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Yemen-Saudi cooperation. Al-Mqhm was very positive about on-going security exchanges, including information and the recent swap of eight Yemeni nationals for five Saudis (ref b), but was unable to provide details on the nature of the information or the names of the prisoners. Al-Mqhm was very open about the SAG's concerns about smuggling of people, goods, arms and cars across the Saudi-Yemen land border, and said that the SAG commissioned the pipe fence to prohibit such traffic in known problem areas. He was adamant that the pipe has not been dismantled, and did not seem sure that it would in fact be dismantled.

[1](#)3. (c) When asked about the 3/21 visit of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal to Sana'a, al-Mqhm was noncommittal on the outcome and unable to comment on any follow-up to the visit. Similarly, when questioned about the Arab League Summit in Tunis, he quickly changed the subject without providing any answer.

UNABLE TO CONFIRM DETAILS OF BORDER SECURITY PLAN OUTLINED IN ROYG MEETINGS

[1](#)4. (c) At a February 24 meeting on another matter, Ministry of Interior Chief of Staff Brigadier General Ahmed Sunidar outlined a Yemen-Saudi border security plan for Pol/Econ Chief and CTC that included guard watchtowers on alternating sides of the border in an a zig-zag pattern with a road along the border for roving car patrols. Citing ROYG resource constraints, he said that the SAG would pay for the infrastructure and that both countries would supply border guards. Note: Responsibility for border security recently passed from MOD to MOI, which has formulated an ambitious plan for MOI border guards/security, but has not been able to begin implementation. End Note.

[1](#)5. (c) Al-Mqhm denied that there is agreement on a plan or arrangements for financing any security measures, but said a joint committee would be formulated to discuss the matter. When asked about a timeframe, he said he believed the border issue and the establishment of the committee would be taken up during the next "Yemen-Saudi Cooperation Council" meeting in Riyadh, which he thought was scheduled to meet the month after the (now canceled) Arab League meeting in Tunis, i.e., in May. Note: This is likely a reference to the Supreme Yemeni-Saudi Coordination Council, which meets once a year under the chairmanship of Yemeni PM Ba Jammal and Prince

Sultan, the Saudi Second Deputy Prime Minister. The last meeting of the council was convened in Sana'a in 7 July, 2003, and a number of cooperation agreements were signed. End note. He agreed that whatever the shape of the border patrol/security plan, the ROYG was likely to request the SAG provide significant financial assistance.

COMMENT: THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

16. (c) Comment: While there seems to be an understanding that a joint committee will be formulating a border security plan, al-Mqhm's statements that no committee exists is in sharp contrast to public statements by Yemeni FM Abu-Bakr al-Qirbi (ref a), and a private statement by another MFA official (ref c) that President Saleh's February 2/17-18 visit to Riyadh produced an agreement and a committee had been formed to address the border. Even allowing that although al-Mqhm is well known to other Emboffs this was his initial meeting with Pol/Econ Chief and he may have been reluctant to go into detail on sensitive subjects, it does not appear that the two sides are fully in sync on this issue or that the Saudis are completely on board with the blueprint for joint monitoring of the border outlined to Emboffs in recent meetings with Yemeni officials from two separate agencies. End comment.  
HULL